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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MINSK 000010

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: ELECTION SITREP 2: GOB OBSTRUCTS OPPOSITION  
CANDIDATES DURING CAMPAIGN

REF: A. 2006 MINSK 1149

[1](#)B. 2006 MINSK 1273  
[1](#)C. MINSK 002

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) This is a second situation report covering the Belarusian local council elections scheduled for January 14. With ten days left until Election Day, authorities are preventing opposition candidates from printing campaign materials and meeting with voters and restricting radio airtime. Opposition coalition party leaders brought their complaints forward at a January 4 press conference, but had not come to a joint decision on whether to boycott the elections. De facto coalition leader Milinkevich and others castigated the party leaders for not using the election process to communicate to the public and viewed a boycott as a betrayal to the voters. Despite the GOB harassment and restrictions and the coalition leadership rhetoric, regional and rural opposition candidates continue getting their message out. End summary.

Publishers Refuse to Print Campaign Materials  
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[1](#)2. (U) In late December and early January, opposition candidates running in the local council elections scheduled for January 14 began complaining that Minsk-based printing presses were refusing to print their campaign leaflets. Reasons for denials varied from "lack of paper," or a "large workload," to Belarusian KGB harassment. Opposition candidates reported that printing presses often demanded the candidates provide written permission from the Central Election Commission (CEC). The CEC allegedly sent a letter to the Information Ministry in late December, but so far printing presses in Minsk were still refusing service to opposition candidates.

[1](#)3. (C) UCP leader Anatoliy Lebedko at a January 4 press conference told reporters and diplomats at least 16 opposition candidates in Minsk were refused printing services. Later that day, Belarusian National Front (BNF) deputy head and Minsk city council candidate Ales Yanukevich confirmed to Poloff that printing presses had refused service to him and other candidates. State-owned establishments claimed they were "backlogged" with orders and private printing presses openly admitted that Belarusian KGB officers "suggested" they not cooperate with opposition candidates. A few candidates in Minsk were able to print their campaign leaflets, but only after deleting portions of the text to satisfy the printing press and authorities.

#### No Printed Material For Campaigning

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14. (C) Yanukevich noted the inability to print leaflets as the biggest problem opposition candidates were currently facing. The early election process begins on January 9 and so far most candidates have no printed information to give voters. Candidates were not legally allowed to print campaign material themselves because 1) the CEC requires leaflets to be marked with appropriate serial numbers and data and 2) candidates are not allowed to use their personal funds in campaigning nor are they allowed to print materials abroad. Yanukevich informed Poloff that he and other candidates would print their leaflets on privately owned typographs. Of course it would be illegal, but they desperately need written information to give to voters before early voting begins. By the time they get caught, they could possibly have delivered thousands of leaflets to home mail boxes.

#### No Place to Campaign

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15. (U) Authorities are restricting opposition candidates from meeting with voters. On December 27, Lebedko announced that Minsk authorities rejected all his applications to meet with voters in public places. (Note: According to the new amendments to the Electoral Code, candidates are required to apply for permission to meet with voters in public apart from pre-designated and inconvenient times and places (ref A). End note.) Gomel city council candidate and organizer of Aleksandr Milinkevich's "For Freedom" movement Viktor Korniyenko on January 4 confirmed this, reporting that Gomel authorities refused to allow him and other opposition candidates to meet with voters in downtown Gomel. Both

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Lebedko and Korniyenko vowed to hold the meetings anyway.

16. (C) Yanukevich described his recent experience in which Minsk authorities granted him permission to meet with voters, but only in a park on the very outskirts of town. Attempts to rent space indoors were met with refusals. According to Yanukevich, authorities would only grant permission for events in the most uncomfortable places so that access to voters was minimal while maintaining the image the opposition candidates were freely able to meet with constituents. In oblast centers and small or rural areas, authorities often flatly refused opposition candidates permission to meet with voters without reason.

#### GOB Restricting Air Time

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17. (C) The CEC granted all candidates a five-minute radio spot free of charge. However, candidates reported that radio station administrations systematically denied them the full five minutes, played the speeches at low-peak listening hours, or did not play the speeches at all. During a December 24 regional trip to Beloozersk (Brest oblast), BNF member and local council candidate Dmitriy Tretiyak told Charge and Poloff that authorities only gave him and the other seven registered opposition candidates in the community two-minutes of radio time (septel). When he asked the radio station why only two minutes, the administration replied that city council candidates were only allowed two minutes, district council candidates were allowed three minutes, and oblast council candidates were allowed the full five minutes.

18. (U) Gomel authorities on December 28 did not broadcast BNF Conservative Christian Party member and Gomel city council candidate Vladimir Shitikov's five-minute address. Immediately after recording the speech, in which he lambasted GOB policies, the local election commission charged Shitikov with violating the electoral code, but would not identify the

violation. On January 3, the Berezovskiy radio station failed to broadcast BNF member and regional council candidate Anatoliy Sakharusha's recorded radio address during peak listening hours, citing "technical difficulties." Sakharusha's address was moved to another, less popular time. State-backed candidates' addresses were aired twice.

To Boycott Or Not  
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¶9. (U) At a January 4 press conference, leaders of opposition parties announced they were still undecided about whether they would join the Belarusian Communist Party's (BCP) boycott of the elections (ref B). The leaders claimed the results of the elections were already determined and cited the authorities' increased use of double standards and complete disregard of electoral regulations. Korniyenko told the leaders not to "fall before the (gun)shot," and advised them to consider withdrawing from the race only after all campaigning opportunities had been exhausted. BNF leader Vintsuk Vyachorka said his party would continue the campaign to the end, noting that from the start they had no illusions that the local elections would be fair. BPC deputy leader Yelena Skrigan claimed candidates who withdrew from the elections were still participating in door-to-door campaigns to explain to voters why the elections would be illegitimate. Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Kozulin) acting chairman Anatoliy Levkovich viewed the local elections as a "technical matter," but stated that they would not boycott.

¶10. (U) The coalition leaders' complaints of the election process and discussion of boycotts drew sharp criticism from Milinkevich. According to Milinkevich, the mere discussion of boycotts was evidence to the coalition leaders' lack of self-confidence after failing to organize a widely advertised, nationwide local election campaign. Milinkevich noted that the opposition was fully aware of the conditions in which they would have to campaign before the election process even began. Each candidate must make use out of every opportunity to inform people and talk of withdrawing should be done only after campaign opportunities are exhausted, according to Milinkevich. He blamed the candidate registration denials of "some" opposition activists on those activists' failure to comply with "simple" requirements.

¶11. (U) Leader of the Belarusian Party of Freedom and Progress and member of the coalition's Political Council Vladimir Novosyad on January 4 also criticized boycott discussions. According to Novosyad, withdrawing candidates from the race would be giving the authorities "a gift," and

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stressed that the local council elections, despite the manipulations and fraud, were an opportunity to communicate with the population. Candidates who withdraw from the race are "betraying" voters who were not afraid to give their signatures in support of that candidate's registration. Novosyad plans to ask the Political Council to not recognize as delegates to the second congress of democratic forces those who failed to submit their signature lists to election commissions for registration and/or boycotted the election. According to Novosyad, such people were "idlers" and had no right to participate in the congress. (Note: More on the preparations (or lack there of) on the congress in septel. End note.)

Comment  
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¶12. (C) Boycotting the elections would be seen as a large cop out by the opposition. Coalition leaders and candidates knew long before the election campaign began that the process would be marred with harassment, manipulation and fraud, with the outcome already determined. A belated boycott would give the impression, much to the GOB's benefit, that the

opposition is incapable of commitment. For the time being, only the BCP is calling for a boycott.

¶13. (C) Milinkevich rightly accused some candidates of half-heartedly conducting campaigns, although Milinkevich himself has not always used every opportunity that has come his way. Belarusian Helsinki Committee head Tatyana Protko December 21 told poloffs that many opposition candidates were just "making the motions" and not really committed to the elections (ref C). However, this is not the case for many opposition candidates in the regions and cities outside of Minsk, who are using their radio spots (although only two-minutes in length) and campaigning door-to-door (with or without official campaign material) to get their message out (septel).

Moore